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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 03/26/07-1

- 1) Top headlines
- 2) Editorials
- 3) Prime Minister's weekend schedule

Opinion polls:

- 4) Yomiuri poll on Abe administration at six months finds 60% of public give him poor evaluation
- 5) Abe Cabinet support rate stabilizes at 35% in Mainichi poll, but non-support rate remains higher at 42%

Defense and security issues:

- 6) Yokota Air Base had 90 spill incidents between 1999-2006 but only one reported to surrounding local governments
- 7) Defense Ministry plans to obtain Okinawa's concurrence for preliminary survey of Futenma relocation site next month
- 8) Sasebo fishing coop falsely claimed damage compensation from US forces use of local waters
- 9) Opposition camp pursuing ruling parties in Diet on subsidies in USFJ realignment bill
- 10) Government trying to use carrot-stick approach to sell USFJ realignment bill but impact on Okinawa's thinking remains unclear
- 11) Government formally adopts BMD emergency guidelines that including intelligence sharing with US

Iraq reconstruction:

- 12) Iraq's vice president in meeting with Abe asks Japan to keep ASDF in Iraq
- 13) Prime Minister Abe promised to cooperate with Iraq to help stabilize the country

Articles:

1) TOP HEADLINES

Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri, Tokyo Shimbun & Akahata:
M-6.9 quake hits Noto Peninsula, killing 1, injuring 190

Nihon Keizai:
Economy still on stable growth path, with signs of improvement in consumption

Sankei:
NTV sponsors reckless driving? Broadcaster told youths they were being filmed

2) EDITORIALS

Asahi:
(1) Quake on Noto Peninsula: Prepare countermeasures to accidents in depopulated areas
(2) Dances by Asian skaters fascinate us

Mainichi:
(1) Rescue and aid to put people's lives back in quake-hit areas in Hokuriku
(2) Prime Minister Abe should make a restart, reflecting on low public support

Yomiuri:
(1) Government urged to prepare countermeasures to unexpected quake
(2) Kansai TV must implement measures to prevent fabricated programs

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Nihon Keizai:
(1) Noto quake shows importance of defenses
(2) Additional sanctions against Iran natural

Sankei:
(1) Introducing effective quake-spot-report system urged
(2) Sanctions against Iran: International community must try to prevent nuclear cooperation with North Korea

Tokyo Shimbun:
(1) Everywhere on the Japanese Islands dangerous
(2) Professional baseball games start

Akahata:
(1) JCP taking initiative in medical fee aid for children

3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, March 24

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
March 25, 2007

08:13
Left JR Tokyo Station on Shinkansen Nozomi 11. Met with Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Suga on Shinkansen.

11:37
Arrived at JR Okayama Station.

11:45
Left the station on Marine Liner 27.

12:39
Arrived at JR Takamatsu Station.

12:51
Met with Lower House member Yoshinori Ono and others at the Takamatsu Marugame Ichibangai building in Takamatsu City. Later, exchanged views with members of the Takamatsu Marugame Shopping

Street Council. Visited the shopping street.

15:10

Met with LDP Upper House Caucus Secretary General Katayama at the Okayama Prefectural Welfare/Volunteer/NPO Hall in Okayama City. Afterwards, met with the mayor of Okayama and exchanged views with members of the crime prevention organization Okayama Guardians.

15:59

Inspected the Okayama Guardians' activities at the Okayama Ichibangai located at the underground shopping mall at JR Okayama Station.

16:53

Responded to an interview with the Okayama Prefecture's press club at Hotel Granvia.

17:17

Left JR Okayama Station on Nozomi 12. Met with Suga on train.

20:46

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Arrived at JR Tokyo Station.

21:07

Had a haircut at Hilton Tokyo.

22:48

Arrived at his private residence in Tomigaya.

Prime Minister's schedule, March 25

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)

March 24, 2007

11:28

Left his private residence in Tomigaya.

11:40

Arrived at Kantei residence.

18:13

Attended a reception commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty at "Tokyo City View" at Roppongi Hills with his wife Akie.

18:58

Arrived at his private residence.

21:20

Arrived at Kantei residence.

4) Yomiuri opinion poll on Abe Cabinet after half-year: 60% do not positively evaluate his achievements, but 54% have hopes for the prime minister in future

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Excerpts)

March 24, 2007

In a nationwide opinion poll (face-to-face interviews) taken by the Yomiuri Shimbun March 17-18 to mark the six months in office of the Abe administration on March 26, those respondents who either "greatly appreciated" or "more or less appreciated" the accomplishments so far of the Abe Cabinet and Prime Minister Abe totaled 36%. However, this was much lower than the 60% in total who either felt they "did not appreciate at all" or "did not appreciate much" the achievements. Compared to the same questions being asked in the December 2006 poll, there was an eight-point drop in positive evaluation and a 15-point increase in negative evaluation. The Cabinet support rate, as well, for March fell for the fifth month in a row to 43.8%. For the prime minister, the challenge will be to reverse the trend by the time the Upper House election comes this summer.

On the other hand, on the question of whether there was expectation

or high hopes for Prime Minister Abe, those who either answered positively or qualified is by saying, "if I had to choose," totaled 54%. This exceeded the 45% who said they had no high hopes for Abe.

5) Abe Cabinet support rate levels off, slips one point to 35% in Mainichi poll; New Komeito supporters are distancing themselves from Abe

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Excerpts)

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March 26, 2007

The Mainichi Shimbun on March 24-25 carried out a telephone-based nationwide opinion poll. It showed the support rate for the cabinet of Prime Minister Abe to be 35%, one point down from the previous poll in February. The non-support rate rose a point to 42%, continuing a trend seen in the last poll. With a lacking of material for boosting the support rate, it appears that such issues as the restoration to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party of former Lower-House member (and postal rebel) Eto, as well as the flap over the utilities expenses of Agricultural Minister Matsuoka, affected the poll results. In addition, there was a great drop in supporters from the New Komeito, indicating that the party is distancing itself from Abe.

The Cabinet support and non-support rates both reached their lowest and highest rate, respectively, since the launching of the administration. The main reason for 53% of the non-supporters was: "I cannot expect leadership from the prime minister."

6) Ninety incidents of hazard-material leaks at Yokota Air Base, 1999-2006, but notification to local government in only one case

ASAHI (Top play) (Slightly abridged)
Eve., March 24, 2007

This newspaper has learned that during the seven-year period 1999-2007, there occurred at the US forces' Yokota Airbase (Tokyo-to) and its related facilities, 90 incidents of accidents in which hazardous materials such as jet fuel that are subject to restriction in the US escaped, with the total volume of leakage reaching approximately 105,000 liters. Only one incident out of the 90 was reported as an accident to local government authorities. Although there is an obligation on the part of the US forces to notify the Japanese side of such incidents, by agreement of the Japan-US Joint Committee, the US forces in Japan also has the right to judge what is reportable, and the reality is that local governments have no capability of checking into the situation.

This state of affairs was discovered from documents released under the US government's Freedom of Information Act, and obtained by a Hitotsubashi University graduate student, Yukinori (?) Hayashi (25). The disclosed documents covered the period September 1999 to May 2006. When broken down by type of incident, based on volume of leakage by the US military, there are "Category 1" incidents involving over 10,000 gallons (1 gallon = 3.78 liters) and considered "posing a serious threat to the health and safety of the public." One such incident occurred at the base's Tokorozawa communication facility (Tokorozawa City, Saitama Prefecture), in which 29,000 gallons of light fuel oil leaked out. There were two incidents of "Category 2" level of danger, 1,000 - 10,000 gallons ("posing a threat to the health and safety of the public"). For example, In July 2005, jet fuel amounting to 2,400 gallons leaked out.

There were six incidents in the next category, 100 - 1,000, "does not pose a danger to health and safety," and 75 incidents of 100 gallons or less leaking out. In six cases, the amount of leakage was unknown.

The US Pacific Air Force Command orders every base to prepare reports on accidents that call into categories 1-3, and for 10

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cases, detailed reports were made, according to the information disclosed. However, the only case that local authorities had a grasp of was the Category 1 incident at Tokorozawa. Notification was never provided to local governments on Category 2 or less accidents.

According to the Foreign Ministry, there was a Joint Committee agreement on March 1997 on procedures for providing information to the Japanese side, which goes: "In the case of the occurrence of incidents or accidents in which there is concern that there would be an effect on public safety or the environment, they should be reported immediately to the Japanese side." The specific items include "the possibility of creating substantial pollution by the misuse or escape of hazardous materials or radioactive substances." The US military is to notify the Foreign Ministry. The mechanism to notify local authorities is via the Defense Facilities Administrative Agency.

However, the decision on whether to notify is left up to the US military. According to the Tokyo Defense Facilities Administrative Bureau, in documents covering 2003 - 2006, there were 18 incidents that were reported by the base. Of these, the only one related to leakage of fuel was the case at the Tokorozawa communications facility.

Hayashi, having analyzed the documents, pointed out: "According to the Status of Forces Agreement between Japan and the United States, there are no set procedures for removing pollution at US bases in Japan. The US military is not under any obligation to restore the land to its original state. There needs to be established for the Japanese side the right to enter bases to investigate."

7) Futenma relocation: Defense Ministry to begin preliminary environmental assessment in April

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged slightly)
March 25, 2007

The Defense Agency has decided to begin in April an environmental assessment of coastal areas around Camp Schwab, the relocation site of the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station. The government, however, will conduct a preliminary assessment instead of a formal assessment that would require the presentation of documents to the prefectural government, in deference to strong negative reactions from local residents.

The assessment will cover costal areas around Camp Schwab and its nearby waters. The Defense Ministry thinks that in order to observe the growth process of coral, it must begin the assessment before June, when the spawning season begins. The ministry will study such matters as the marine habitat for coral, water quality, and air for a year. It will carry out bidding on March 28 to select a contractor.

The government initially considered a formal assessment, but Nago in January presented a plan to revise the government's plan, which displeased Tokyo. The Okinawa prefectural government was also reluctant to accept the government's documents detailing the method of the assessment, saying that doing so might be taken as concurrence with the government plan. Given the situation, the Defense Ministry intends to push ahead with the preliminary assessment to use its findings as the basis for a formal assessment

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that will follow. The ministry plans to hold talks on the planned formal assessment with the prefectural government once the Upper House Okinawa by-election is over.

8) Senior Fukuoka defense official, Sasebo fishermen fraudulently claim US base compensation money

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Slightly excerpt)
March 26, 2007

The Defense Facilities Administration Agency has decided to file a

criminal complaint with Nagasaki police tomorrow against more than a dozen fishermen in Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture, and a senior member of the Fukuoka Defense Facilities Administration Bureau (DFAB) on suspicion of conspiring to fraudulently use state money paid as compensation for damage caused by the US military's use of waters near the US Sasebo Naval Base.

This is first case of involvement of a regional DFAB, which is responsible for screening and supervising compensation for damage caused by the US military use, is misuse of funds. The case has exposed a murky compensation program based on cozy relations between government authorities and the fishing industry.

In the sea areas used by the US military, fishing operations are not allowed under the law restricting operations by fishing boats. Given this, regional DFABs are engaged in examining ledgers on harvests in waters other than the restricted areas and pay compensation money to fishermen's unions.

According to informed sources, the Sasebo Fishermen's Union reported seven fleets of net-fishing boats engaged in operations, but four of the seven were found to not have been in operation. The officials concerned at the DFAB, while knowing the actual situation, filed forged documents though consultations with fishermen, and the official and the fishermen pocketed several million yen annually over the past several years.

9) Deliberations begin on US force realignment bill; Government's plan to subsidize municipal governments draws questions from opposition camp

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
March 24, 2007

A Lower House plenary session on March 23 began deliberating on a US forces realignment special measures law featuring a step to subsidize the municipal governments bearing greater burdens in the force realignment plan. In explaining the bill, Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma, said: "It is vital for maintaining the peace and stability of Japan and for alleviating the burdens on residents." Opposition parties intend to raise questions about the system designed to provide subsidies in accordance with the state of progress in implementing the plan and about Japan's financial burden for the Guam relocation plan. How Diet deliberations will proceed remains unclear.

Under the proposed legislation, the subsidies will be provided to host municipalities in four stages of the realignment work: (1) the acceptance of a government plan, (2) the start of an environmental assessment, (3) the start of construction work, and (4) the completion of the project. The system is intended to win cooperation

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on the US force realignment by providing carrots to the municipalities that have accepted the government's plan.

In the Diet session, Japanese Communist Party lawmaker Seiken Akamine lashed out at the government, saying, "The government is trying to pin down the municipal governments with money." Defense chief Kyuma rebutted, "It is natural for the government to take a step in response to contributions by municipalities."

Japan's financial contribution to the relocation of US Marine Corps from Okinawa to Guam is also a point of contention. Foreign Minister Taro Aso replied, "In order to reduce the burden on Okinawa, Japan will make an appropriate financial contribution to the force relocation." Opposition parties have raised questions about the rationale behind Japan's plan to make financial contributions.

10) Diet begins deliberations on US force realignment bill; Okinawa and other municipalities alarmed at government's carrot-and-stick approach

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
March 24, 2007

The Lower House on March 23 began deliberations on a US force realignment special measures bill incorporating a plan to establish a system to subsidize affected municipal governments. Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma explained the legislation in the plenary session and before the Security Committee. The government aims to elicit cooperation from affected municipalities by using subsidies. Okinawa and other areas are highly alarmed at the government's carrot-and-stick approach. Passage of the bill by the Diet does not guarantee the smooth implementation of the US force realignment.

Kyuma explained the significance of the planned subsidy system this way: "Many municipal governments have expressed their hopes for force realignment subsidies. Responding to their requests will help smoothly implement the force realignment."

According to the Defense Ministry, of the 68 affected municipalities, 46 have expressed their support for the US force realignment. Although some municipalities have apparently agreed to the realignment plan in anticipation of subsidies, such municipalities as Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture, the relocation site of carrier-borne aircraft, are cautious about realignment.

The plan to relocate the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station from Ginowan to the coastline of Camp Schwab in Nago has been stalled over the Tokyo-Washington agreement to build a V-shaped pair of runways. Talks between the government and the affected municipalities have not been held since January. The effectiveness of the planned subsidies remains unclear.

In the plenary session, many opposition lawmakers raised questions about Japan's financial contributions to the force realignment project. In response, Kyuma indicated that the government has not finished its calculations, saying: "Given the nation's tight financial situation, we will keenly examine views and necessary costs."

11) Cabinet adopts BMD emergency response guidelines;
Intelligence-sharing with US to be issue

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ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
March 24, 2007

The cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe adopted on March 23 emergency response guidelines for a ballistic missile defense (BMD) system that stipulates the procedures for intercepting ballistic missiles on the authority of a unit commander. Although the Defense Ministry aims at simultaneous operations of the BMD emergency response guidelines and civilian control, some national defense advocates in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) are concerned about whether the guidelines will be effective in an actual conflict. Sharing intelligence, including on missiles, with the United States, and legal improvement are issues to be resolved.

Under the emergency response guidelines, unit commanders are allowed to intercept enemy missiles after they find "signs" of a state of emergency. In a meeting on March 13 of the LDP Research Council, many council members raised objections to the guidelines, arguing,

"Does it mean that we should wait to die without doing anything? It is meaningless to intercept enemy missiles after confirming them. We need to create a 24-hour-response system."

Therefore, reaching an agreement in the LDP was delayed for a week.

The reason for the delay is Japan's dependence on the United States in the intelligence area. Japan relies on the US military regarding early-warning satellite intelligence, through which it can detect signs of a missile launch. The LDP has decided to set up a project team that will re-study how Japan-US cooperation and BMD law should be consolidated.

The government will introduce later this month the Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3) to the Air Self-Defense Force's Iruma base in Saitama Prefecture, as well as in the Tokyo area. The emergency

response guidelines will be applied to the planned PAC-3 deployment. The PAC-3 is a mobile system with the range of several kilometers. Therefore, securing places for equipment will be an issue to be considered.

12) Iraqi vice president asks for continuation of ASDF operation

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
March 24, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met on March 23 with Iraqi Vice President Taril al-Hashimi. Hashimi asked Abe to continue Japan's Air Self-Defense Force's mission in Iraq, saying, "In order also to maintain friendly relations between Iraq and Japan, I want you to continue the ASDF operations." Abe then responded:

"Iraqi's stability is indispensable for the stability of the international community. It is also extremely important for Japan's interests. So, we have decided to submit to the Diet a bill to extend the ASDF mission."

13) Prime Minister Abe promises Japan's stable cooperation to Iraq Vice President Hashimi

YOMIURI (Page 2)(Full)
March 24, 2007

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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held talks with Iraq Vice President Taril al-Hashimi on the night of March 23. In the meeting, Abe told Hashimi that Japan would continue its Air Self-Defense Force mission in his country by extending the Iraq Special Measures Law for two years. The prime minister also promised Japan's cooperation for reconciliation among the people of Iraq, in which sectarian and ethnic conflicts have continued.

The vice president expressed his gratitude and told Abe:

"We are experiencing difficulties in improving security. But the sectarian conflict will be resolved soon or later. Since it is mainly the Sunnis that have carried out resistance activities, efforts are needed to win them over."

Hashimi met also with Foreign Minister Taro Aso on the evening of the same day.

The Japanese government will invite 15 influential Iraqi parliamentary members to hold a meeting with them from March 25. During the session, Tokyo will explain to them its experiences in bringing peace to Cambodia, as well as the views of Japan's experts, as part of its effort to indirectly support Iraq's reconstruction. In consideration of the balance of sects and ethnic groups, the 15 Iraqi parliamentarians are made up of seven Shiites, four Sunnis, and one Turkmen.

Final coordination is underway on a plan for a visit to Japan in April by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Hashimi is a Sunni and Maliki is a Shiite.

The purpose of Japan's invitations of influential Iraqi leaders is to build strategic relations with Iraq, which ranks third on the list of countries with crude oil deposits.

SCHIEFFER